

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

EXPOSURE APPARATUS, MAINTENANCE METHOD THEREFOR,
SEMICONDUCTOR DEVICE MANUFACTURING METHOD USING THE
APPARATUS, AND SEMICONDUCTOR MANUFACTURING FACTORY

5

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to an exposure
apparatus for projecting a mask pattern onto a
photosensitive substrate via a projection optical
10 system, a maintenance method for the apparatus, a
semiconductor device manufacturing method using the
apparatus, and a semiconductor manufacturing factory.

BACKGROUND-OF THE INVENTION

15 A conventional manufacturing process for a
semiconductor element such as an LSI or VLSI formed
from a micropattern uses a reduction type projection
exposure apparatus for transferring by reduction
projection a circuit pattern drawn on a mask such as a
20 reticle onto a substrate coated with a photosensitive
agent. With an increase in the packaging density of
semiconductor elements, demands have arisen for further
micropatterning. Exposure apparatuses are coping with
micropatterning along with the development of a resist
25 process.

Methods of increasing the resolving power of the
exposure apparatus include a method of changing the

exposure wavelength to a shorter one, and a method of increasing the numerical aperture (NA) of the projection optical system.

As for the exposure wavelength, a KrF excimer
5 laser with an oscillation wavelength of 365-nm i-line to recently 248 nm, and an ArF excimer laser with an oscillation wavelength around 193 nm have been developed. A fluorine (F₂) excimer laser with an oscillation wavelength around 157 nm is also under
10 development.

An ArF excimer laser with a wavelength around ultraviolet rays, particularly, 193 nm, and a fluorine (F₂) excimer laser with an oscillation wavelength around 157 nm are known to have an oxygen (O₂)
15 absorption band around their wavelength band.

For example, a fluorine excimer laser has been applied to an exposure apparatus because of a short wavelength of 157 nm. The 157-nm wavelength falls within a wavelength region called a vacuum ultraviolet
20 region. Light in this wavelength region is greatly absorbed by oxygen molecules. In other words, light hardly passes through the air. Thus, the fluorine excimer laser can only be applied in a low-oxygen-concentration environment. According to
25 reference "Photochemistry of Small Molecules" (Hideo Okabe, A Wiley-Interscience Publication, 1978, p. 178), the absorption coefficient of oxygen to 157-nm light is

about $190 \text{ atm}^{-1}\text{cm}^{-1}$. This means when 157-nm light passes through a gas at an oxygen concentration of 1% at one atmospheric pressure, the transmittance per cm is only

5
$$T = \exp(-190 \times 1 \text{ cm} \times 0.01 \text{ atm}) = 0.150$$

In such an exposure apparatus using an ArF excimer laser with a wavelength around ultraviolet rays, particularly, 193 nm, or a fluorine (F_2) excimer laser with a wavelength around 157 nm, an ArF excimer laser
10 beam or fluorine (F_2) excimer laser beam is readily absorbed by a substance. A light absorption substance in the optical path must be purged to several ppm order or less. This also applies to moisture, which must be removed to ppm order or less.

15 To ensure the transmittance and stability of ultraviolet rays, the ultraviolet path of a reticle stage or the like in the exposure apparatus is purged with inert gas. For example, Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 6-260385 discloses a method of spraying inert gas
20 to a photosensitive substrate, which is not enough to purge oxygen or moisture. Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 8-279458 discloses a method of covering the whole space from the lower end of a projection optical system to the vicinity of a photosensitive substrate with a
25 sealing member. However, the stage is difficult to move, and this method is not practical. Japanese Patent Application No. 2000-179590 discloses a method

of disposing a cover for covering the ultraviolet path from the reticle-side lower end of an illumination optical system to the vicinity of a reticle stage, and spraying inert gas into the cover. However, oxygen or
5 moisture cannot be sufficiently purged because the space from a reticle holder for holding a reticle to a reticle surface plate for supporting a reticle stage is not surrounded. In addition, a sheet glass is set on the reticle stage side serving as a movable portion,
10 which increases the weight of the reticle stage. Since the scan stroke range of the reticle stage must be covered with the sheet glass, a large sheet glass is required to further increase the weight. The sheet glass deforms by driving of the reticle stage, changing
15 the optical characteristics. Particularly when the sheet glass functions as an optical element, changes in optical characteristics typically appear. In this case, the optical characteristics must be uniform within the scan stroke range, resulting in a very complicated
20 process. Connection of an inert gas supply tube to the reticle stage side serving as a movable portion transmits vibrations from the tube. Scan operation while the tube is connected degrades the control characteristics of the reticle stage.

25 As described above, an exposure apparatus using an ultraviolet ray, particularly, an ArF excimer laser beam or fluorine (F₂) excimer laser beam suffers large

absorption of light of this wavelength by oxygen and moisture. To obtain a sufficient transmittance and stability of an ultraviolet ray, the oxygen and moisture concentrations in the optical path must be
5 reduced.

From this, demands have arisen for the development of an effective purge system for the ultraviolet light path in the exposure apparatus, particularly for the vicinity of a wafer and reticle
10 which are often loaded/unloaded into/from the exposure apparatus.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention has been made to overcome
15 the conventional drawbacks, and has as its object to provide a device for effectively purging, e.g., part of the optical path with inert gas in an exposure apparatus for projecting a reticle pattern onto a photosensitive substrate via a projection optical
20 system, a semiconductor device manufacturing method using the apparatus, a manufacturing factory, and a maintenance method therefor.

According to the first aspect of the present invention, the foregoing object is attained by
25 providing an exposure apparatus comprising a reticle stage which holds a reticle, a reticle surface plate which supports the reticle stage, a projection optical

system which projects a pattern of the reticle onto a substrate, a shield which surrounds a space between the reticle stage and the reticle surface plate through which exposure light passes and shields the space from outside, and a gas supply which supplies inert gas into
5 the space shielded by the shield.

In the preferred embodiment, the shield is supported by the reticle stage. The shield is preferably arranged to allow movement of the reticle
10 stage on the reticle surface plate. The shield can be formed from a plate member. The shield can include an air curtain or a hydrostatic bearing disposed between the reticle stage and the reticle surface plate.

In the preferred embodiment, the inert gas
15 supplied to the hydrostatic bearing is also supplied to the space shielded by the shield to purge the space.

It is preferable that the apparatus mentioned above further comprises a sheet glass set on the reticle surface plate so as to separate, from the space
20 shielded by the shield, a space inside an opening which is formed in the reticle surface plate to transmit exposure light.

It is preferable that the apparatus mentioned above further comprises a second gas supply which
25 supplies inert gas to the space separated by the sheet glass.

It is preferable that the apparatus mentioned

above further comprises a gas recovery which recovers gas from the space shielded by the shield.

It is preferable that the apparatus mentioned above further comprises a sensor arranged to measure a
5 pressure in the space shielded by the shield and a controller arranged to control the gas supply on the basis of the pressure measured by the sensor.

It is preferable that the apparatus mentioned above further comprises a cleaning gas supply which
10 supplies cleaning gas into the space shielded by the shield. The cleaning gas can include at least one of oxygen and ozone.

The apparatus can further comprise an illumination optical system and an enclosure which
15 surrounds a space between the illumination optical system and the reticle stage through which exposure light passes. It is preferable that the enclosure is arranged such that a gap is provided between a lower end thereof and the reticle stage, and the reticle
20 stage has, around the reticle, a top plate with a surface flush with an upper surface of the reticle.

The apparatus can further comprise a substrate stage which holds the substrate and an enclosure which surrounds a space between the projection optical system
25 and the substrate stage through which exposure light passes. It is preferable that the enclosure is arranged such that a gap is provided between a lower

end thereof and the substrate stage, and the substrate stage has, around the substrate, a top plate with a surface flush with an upper surface of the substrate.

In the preferred embodiment, the shield is so
5 arranged as to prevent an opening of the reticle surface plate from deviating from a region defined by the shield.

According to the second aspect of the present invention, the foregoing object is attained by
10 providing an exposure apparatus comprising a reticle stage which holds a reticle, a reticle surface plate which supports the reticle stage, the reticle surface plate having an opening for transmitting exposure light, a projection optical system which projects a pattern of
15 the reticle onto a substrate, and a sheet glass set on the reticle surface plate so as to separate a space inside the opening of the reticle surface plate from a space above the reticle surface plate.

According to the third aspect of the present
20 invention, the foregoing object is attained by providing an exposure apparatus comprising an optical system, a stage which moves with a flat object during exposure, and an enclosure which surrounds a space between the optical system and the stage through which
25 exposure light passes. The enclosure is arranged such that a gap is provided between a lower end thereof and the stage, and the stage has, around the flat object, a

top plate with a surface flush with an upper surface of the flat object.

The optical system may be an illumination optical system, and the stage may be a reticle stage.

- 5 Alternatively, the optical system may be a projection optical system, and the stage may be a substrate stage.

According to the fourth aspect of the present invention, the foregoing object is attained by providing a device manufacturing method comprising the
10 steps of installing, in a semiconductor manufacturing factory, manufacturing apparatuses for various processes including the above exposure apparatus and manufacturing a semiconductor device by a plurality of processes using the manufacturing apparatuses.

- 15 It is preferable that the method mentioned above further comprises the steps of connecting the manufacturing apparatuses via a local area network and communicating information about at least one of the manufacturing apparatuses between the local area
20 network and an external network outside the semiconductor manufacturing factory.

It is preferable that the method mentioned above further comprises the step of accessing a database provided by a vendor or user of the exposure apparatus
25 via the external network, thereby obtaining maintenance information of the exposure apparatus by data communication.

It is preferable that the method mentioned above further comprises the step of performing data communication between the semiconductor manufacturing factory and another semiconductor manufacturing factory via the external network, thereby performing production management.

According to the fifth aspect of the present invention, the foregoing object is attained by providing a semiconductor manufacturing factory comprising: manufacturing apparatuses for various processes including the above exposure apparatus; a local area network for connecting the manufacturing apparatuses; and a gateway for allowing access to an external network outside the factory from the local area network, wherein information about at least one of the manufacturing apparatuses is communicated.

According to the sixth aspect of the present invention, the foregoing object is attained by providing a maintenance method for the above exposure apparatus that is installed in a semiconductor manufacturing factory, comprising the steps of: making a vendor or user of the exposure apparatus provide a maintenance database connected to an external network outside the semiconductor manufacturing factory; allowing access to the maintenance database from the semiconductor manufacturing factory via the external network; and transmitting maintenance information

accumulated in the maintenance database to the semiconductor manufacturing factory via the external network.

It is preferable that the apparatus further comprises a display, a network interface and a computer for executing network software, and the display, the network interface, and the computer enable communicating maintenance information of the exposure apparatus via a computer network.

10 In the preferred embodiment, the network software provides on the display the user interface for accessing a maintenance database provided by a vendor or user of the exposure apparatus and connected to the external network outside a factory in which the exposure apparatus is installed, and information is
15 obtained from the database via the external network.

Other features and advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which like reference characters designate
20 the same or similar parts throughout the figures thereof.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

25 The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of the specification, illustrate embodiments of the invention and, together

with the description, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

Fig. 1A is a schematic view showing a projection exposure apparatus according to the first embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 1B is a sectional view taken along the line B - B in Fig. 1A;

Fig. 1C is a sectional view taken along the line C - C in Fig. 1A;

Fig. 2A is a schematic view showing a projection exposure apparatus according to the second embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 2B is a sectional view taken along the line B - B in Fig. 2A;

Fig. 2C is a sectional view taken along the line C - C in Fig. 2A;

Fig. 3A is a schematic view showing a projection exposure apparatus according to the third embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 3B is a sectional view taken along the line B - B in Fig. 3A;

Fig. 3C is a sectional view taken along the line C - C in Fig. 3A;

Fig. 4 is a schematic view showing the structure of a projection exposure apparatus around a reticle according to the fourth embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 5 is a flow chart showing projection exposure operation according to the fifth embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 6A is a schematic view showing a structure of a projection exposure apparatus around a reticle according to the sixth embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 6B is a schematic view showing another structure of the projection exposure apparatus around the reticle according to the sixth embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 7 is a view showing a semiconductor device production system according to the present invention when viewed from a given angle;-

Fig. 8 is a view showing the semiconductor device production system according to the present invention when viewed from another angle;

Fig. 9 is a view showing an example of a user interface in the exposure apparatus of the present invention;

Fig. 10 is a flow chart showing a semiconductor device manufacturing process;

Fig. 11 is a flow chart showing a wafer process (step 4) in detail; and

Fig. 12 is a view schematically showing a mechanism of mixing cleaning gas in inert gas.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

An exposure apparatus according to the present invention is not limited except for arrangements defined by the appended claims.

5 Ultraviolet rays as exposure light used in the exposure apparatus of the present invention are not specifically limited. A purge system according to the present invention is particularly effective for an ArF excimer laser with a wavelength around far ultraviolet
10 rays, particularly, 193 nm, and a fluorine (F₂) excimer laser with a wavelength around 157 nm, as described above.

Preferred embodiments of the present invention will be described below with reference to the
15 accompanying drawings.

<First Embodiment>

Fig. 1A shows the main part of a step & scan type projection exposure apparatus according to the first embodiment of the present invention. Figs. 1B and 1C
20 are sectional views of the exposure apparatus in Fig. 1A taken along the lines B - B and C - C, respectively. In Figs. 1A to 1C, ultraviolet rays which have reached an illumination optical system 1 in the exposure apparatus from an ultraviolet source (not
25 shown) irradiate a reticle 6 held by a reticle holder 13 on a reticle stage 7. A cover 3 serving as an enclosure for surrounding the ultraviolet path and

shielding it from the surroundings extends from the reticle-side lower end of the illumination optical system 1 toward the vicinity of the reticle stage 7. Supply portions (including, e.g., a flow path and nozzle) 2 for supplying purge gas made of inert gas, into the cover 3 are formed. The gap between the lower end of the cover 3 and the reticle 6 is S1. Inert gas such as nitrogen, helium, or argon is supplied from the illumination optical system 1 into the cover 3 via the gas supply portions 2 to purge an exposure obstacle such as oxygen or moisture.

A top plate 8 is mounted on the reticle stage 7 so as to be flush with the upper surface of the reticle 6. This prevents the reticle stage 7 from shifting from a portion effectively purged by the cover 3 even if the reticle stage 7 moves by scan operation. The impurity inside the cover 3 can be satisfactorily removed. It is more desirable to surround a purge area 9 outside the cover 3 with another cover or the like, purge the purge area 9, and remove the impurity to a given degree. With this arrangement, the impurity inside the cover 3 can be removed to a lower concentration. An example of the purge area 9 can be a space defined by a chain double-dashed line.

A linear motor stator 12 is attached to a reticle stage traveling surface 11 on a reticle surface plate 10 for supporting the reticle stage 7. The reticle

stage 7 moves while being guided by the linear motor stator 12. A chuck groove 15 is formed in the periphery of a reticle chuck surface 14 of the reticle holder 13 on the reticle stage 7. The reticle 6 is set
5 on the reticle chuck surface 14 while the entire periphery of the reticle 6 is in contact with the reticle chuck surface 14 (note that no problem occurs even if part of the reticle chuck surface 14 is notched and part of the reticle 6 is not in contact with the
10 reticle chuck surface 14 as far as the gap is small). The inside of the reticle chuck surface 14 of the reticle holder 13 and the center of the reticle stage 7 are opened as a space so as to transmit an exposure light beam. The center of the reticle surface plate 10
15 is also opened to transmit an exposure light beam. The reticle surface plate 10 has gas supply portions 16 for supplying purge gas made of inert gas.

An enclosure 17 serving as a shield for schematically shielding the opening of the reticle
20 stage and the opening of the reticle surface plate from the surroundings is attached to the reticle surface plate side of the opening of the reticle stage. The gap between the lower end of the enclosure 17 and the reticle surface plate 10 is S2. The enclosure 17 is so
25 arranged as to prevent the opening of the reticle surface plate from deviating from the internal region defined by the enclosure 17 during scan exposure.

As a conceivable example of the enclosure 17, the opening of the reticle stage 7 is surrounded by a cover (e.g., plate member) attached to the reticle stage 7, the opening of the reticle stage 7 is surrounded by a hydrostatic bearing 18 for guiding the reticle stage 7, or the opening of the reticle stage 7 is surrounded by a cover and one or more hydrostatic bearings 18 (Fig. 1C). A preferable cover is one made of a metal such as stainless steel or one made of a resin such as fluoroplastics. The enclosure 17 may be implemented by an air curtain using inert gas.

Purge gas made of inert gas is supplied into a space defined by the reticle 6, the reticle stage 7, the reticle surface plate 10, the enclosure 17, and a projection optical system 19 via the gas supply portions 16 formed in the reticle surface plate 10. It is also possible to purge the space by using only inert gas supplied to the hydrostatic bearing 18 without forming the gas supply portions 16.

Ultraviolet rays having passed through the reticle 6 irradiate a wafer 21 on a wafer stage 20 via the projection optical system 19. The projection optical system 19 has a cover 22 serving as an enclosure which extends from the wafer-side lower end of the projection optical system 19 toward the vicinity of the wafer stage 20 and shields the ultraviolet path from the surroundings. Nozzles 23 serving as supply

ports for supplying purge gas made of inert gas into the cover 22 are arranged. Inert gas such as nitrogen, helium, or argon is supplied from the projection optical system 19 into the cover 22 via the nozzles 23 to purge an exposure obstacle such as oxygen or moisture. The gap between the lower end of the cover 22 and the wafer 21 is S3.

A top plate 24 is mounted on the wafer stage 20 to be flush with the wafer 21. This prevents the wafer stage 20 from shifting from a portion effectively purged by the cover 22 even if the wafer stage 20 moves by scan operation.

The impurities inside the cover 22 can be satisfactorily removed. It is more desirable to purge a purge area 25 outside the cover 22 and remove the impurities to a certain degree. In this case, the impurities inside the cover 22 can be removed to a lower concentration. An example of the purge area 25 is a space defined by a projection optical system surface plate 26, wafer stage surface plate 27, and partition 28.

To prevent transmission of vibrations or deformation from the wafer stage surface plate 27 to the projection optical system surface plate 26, the partition 28 is formed from a bellows-like elastic member. Alternatively, it may also be possible to form the partition 28 from a general rigid member instead of

the bellows structure, and form a small gap in the whole periphery between the partition 28 and the projection optical system surface plate 26 without coupling the partition 28 to the projection optical
5 system surface plate 26. Since the amount of purge gas increases because purge gas leaks from this gap, no vibrations or deformation transmits. Alternatively, it may also be possible to omit a stage damper 29, form the partition 28 from a general rigid member instead of
10 the bellows structure, and integrally suspend the wafer stage surface plate 27 from the projection optical system surface plate 26 by the partition 28.

In the exposure apparatus of the first embodiment, the impurity in the optical path of a fluorine gas
15 laser light can be purged even with the use of a fluorine gas laser light for exposure light, thereby ensuring a satisfactory transmittance and stability. By connecting an inert gas supply tube to the reticle surface plate 10, the control characteristics of the
20 reticle stage 7 can be improved because no vibrations from the tube do not transmit to the reticle stage 7.

<Second Embodiment>

Fig. 2A shows the main part of a step & scan type projection exposure apparatus according to the second
25 embodiment of the present invention. Figs. 2B and 2C are sectional views of the exposure apparatus in Fig. 2A taken along the lines B - B and C - C,

respectively. In the second embodiment, a sheet glass 30 is attached to the opening of a reticle surface plate 10 in place of the enclosure 17 described in the first embodiment. A first space 100 is defined by a
5 reticle 6, a reticle stage 7, the reticle surface plate 10, and the sheet glass 30. A second space 200 is defined by the reticle surface plate 10, the sheet glass 30, and a projection optical system 19. The sheet glass 30 is laid out such that its upper surface
10 (i.e., the surface on the reticle stage 7 side) is flush with the upper surface (i.e., the surface on the reticle stage 7 side) of the reticle surface plate 10. By reducing the step in this manner, the optical path extending from the lower surface of the reticle stage 7
15 to the projection optical system 19 is hardly disturbed by scan operation of the reticle stage 7. Accordingly, the concentrations of the impurities which absorb ultraviolet rays stabilize, and spatial and temporal changes in exposure amount further stabilize. The
20 sheet glass 30 may be an optical element for correcting the optical characteristics of exposure light. Conceivable examples of the sheet glass 30 are a spherical lens such as a concave, convex, or cylindrical lens, an aspherical lens, and an optical
25 element whose plane has undergone partial aspherical processing. The sheet glass 30 is preferably so attached as to easily exchange it when contaminants are

deposited on the surface. The reticle surface plate 10 has gas supply portions 16 for supplying purge gas made of inert gas into the first and second spaces 100 and 200. The remaining arrangement is the same as that in
5 the first embodiment.

In the exposure apparatus of the second embodiment, the first and second spaces 100 and 200 are purged even if the reticle stage 7 moves by scan operation. Since this exposure apparatus does not
10 require any enclosure 17 attached to the reticle stage 7, unlike the first embodiment, the reticle stage 7 can be simplified. Since the sheet glass 30 is set on the reticle surface plate 10 serving as a stationary portion, the reticle stage 7 can be further simplified
15 without any deformation of the sheet glass 30 caused by driving of the stage or any changes in optical characteristics.

<Third Embodiment>

Fig. 3A shows the main part of a step & scan type
20 projection exposure apparatus according to the third embodiment of the present invention. Figs. 3B and 3C are sectional views of the exposure apparatus in Fig. 3A taken along the lines B - B and C - C, respectively. The third embodiment adopts both an
25 enclosure 17 as in the first embodiment and a sheet glass 30 as in the second embodiment. A reticle surface plate 10 has gas supply portions 16 for

supplying purge gas made of inert gas into a space 110 defined by a reticle 6, a reticle stage 7, a reticle surface plate 10, the enclosure 17, and the sheet glass 30, and a space 210 defined by the reticle surface plate 10, the sheet glass 30, and a projection optical system 19. The remaining arrangement is the same as that in the first embodiment.

In the exposure apparatus of the third embodiment, the purge area between the reticle 6 and the projection optical system 19 is divided. As a result, the concentration distribution of the impurities which absorb a fluorine gas laser beam stabilizes, and spatial and temporal changes in exposure amount become smaller and stable. Since the space in the opening of the reticle stage 7 can hold high airtightness, the concentrations of the impurities which absorb a fluorine gas laser beam are further suppressed to increase the transmittance, and the concentration distribution further stabilizes to reduce and stabilize spatial and temporal changes in exposure amount.

Moreover, the consumption amount of purge gas can be reduced, and the purge time until the impurities in the purge area decreases to predetermined concentrations or less can be shortened.

<Fourth Embodiment>

Fig. 4 is a view showing a structure from the illumination optical system to reticle surface plate of

an exposure apparatus according to the fourth embodiment. In the fourth embodiment, a supply port 31 for supplying purge gas is formed on one side of a reticle surface plate 10 in the third embodiment, and a recovery port 32 for recovering purge gas is formed on the other side of the reticle surface plate 10, thereby purging a purge area 110 with purge gas. This can also be applied to the first and second embodiments. Purge gas is supplied from the supply port 31 to the vicinity of a reticle in a direction indicated by an arrow. At the same time, the purge gas is recovered from a recovery port 32. Exposure light enters a projection optical system via a sheet glass 30. The direction in which purge gas flows may be parallel, perpendicular, or oblique to the scan direction, or may change together with scan. The purge gas direction is desirably perpendicular to the scan direction so as not to generate any exposure difference in the scan direction.

In the exposure apparatus of the fourth embodiment, the impurities in the optical path of a fluorine gas laser can be purged even with the use of a fluorine gas laser for exposure light, thereby ensuring a satisfactory transmittance and stability of exposure light. In addition, the supply and recovery ports are formed to positively generate the flow of purge gas from the supply port to the recovery port. This can

prevent contamination in the purge area owing to residence of the purge gas in the purge area.

<Fifth Embodiment>

Fig. 5 is a flow chart in a case wherein inert gas flows only when a wafer and/or reticle is loaded below a cover 3 and/or cover 22 in order to save the amount of inert gas in the first to fourth embodiments. Similarly, the presence/absence of top plates 8 and 24 is also considered, and inert gas is saved by flowing inert gas only when a top plate is loaded.

<Sixth Embodiment>

The sixth embodiment employs pressure sensors within covers 3 and 22 in the exposure apparatuses of the first to fifth embodiments, and adopts a purge gas supply unit having a function of controlling the gas pressure in a purged space. The purge gas pressure in the space is controlled to a constant value regardless of the space on the basis of pressure values measured by the pressure sensors.

The effects unique to this arrangement will be explained. The interior of the lens barrel of an illumination optical system 1 or projection optical system 19 is also purged to an almost sealed system with inert gas in order to remove the impurity. The interior of the lens barrel maintains an almost constant pressure without following external pressure variations. For this reason, a pressure difference is

generated between the inside and outside of the lens barrel in accordance with the pressure variations outside the lens barrel. Then, an optical element below the illumination optical system 1 or projection optical system 19 deforms in accordance with the pressure difference, and the optical performance changes in accordance with the pressure variations. However, by controlling the purge gas pressures inside the covers 3 and 22 below these optical elements to constant values, the sixth embodiment can prevent generation of any pressure difference and can suppress changes in optical performance caused by the pressure variations.

Fig. 6A shows an embodiment in which pressure sensors 33 are arranged inside the cover 3 and inside the reticle stage 7 or the opening of the reticle surface plate 10 in the first embodiment, and a purge gas supply unit 34 having a function of controlling the purge gas pressure is disposed upstream of the gas supply portion 16. The purge gas supply unit 34 controls the purge gas pressure on the basis of pressure values measured by the pressure sensors 33, and thus controls purge gas pressures inside the covers 3 and 22 regardless of the external pressure.

Fig. 6B shows an embodiment in which pressure sensors 33 are arranged at three portions, i.e., inside the cover 3, inside the reticle stage 7, and above the

projection optical system 19 in the third embodiment,
and a purge gas supply unit 34 having a function of
controlling the purge gas pressure is adopted. When a
sheet glass 30 is attached to the reticle surface plate
5 10, like this embodiment, purge gas pressures in a
space 100 inside the reticle stage 7 and a space 200
above the projection optical system 19 are controlled
to constant values. No pressure difference is
generated between the spaces 100 and 200, the sheet
10 glass 30 does not deform, and changes in optical
performance can be suppressed. Furthermore, purge gas
pressures in a space 300 and the space 100 above and
below the reticle 6 also keep constant without
generating any pressure difference between them, and
15 the reticle 6 does not deform.

If the flexure of the reticle 6 by its weight or
its flatness causes defocus or distortion, the purge
gas pressure in the internal space of the reticle stage
7 defined by the reticle 6, the reticle stage 7, an
20 enclosure 17, the reticle surface plate 10, and the
sheet glass 30 is controlled to an optimal known value,
thereby deforming the reticle 6 or sheet glass 30 by a
predetermined amount. As a result, defocus or
distortion can be reduced. The optimal pressure is a
25 pressure which minimizes defocus and distortion checked
by performing exposure using a desired reticle 6 in
advance while changing the purge gas pressure.

Alternatively, the optimal pressure may be obtained by simulation calculation.

<Seventh Embodiment>

In the first to sixth embodiments, purge gas made
5 of inert gas such as nitrogen, helium, or argon is
supplied through each nozzle. An exposure apparatus
according to the seventh embodiment also comprises a
mechanism of mixing cleaning gas such as oxygen (O_2)
and/or ozone (O_3) in the inert gas.

10 A detailed arrangement will be described with
reference to Fig. 12. In normal exposure, a valve 1202
is closed to prevent mixing of oxygen and/or ozone, and
a valve 1201 is opened to supply only inert gas into an
optical path, i.e., purge area through a gas supply
15 portion 16. In a standby state in which the exposure
apparatus is inactive, during normal exposure at a
designated time interval, or in a case wherein a
reticle is set on the reticle stage, the valve 1202 is
opened to mix a small amount of oxygen and/or ozone in
20 inert gas and purge the purge area. Without loading
any wafer, dummy exposure operation is done for a
predetermined time or until a described illuminance at
the image plane is attained. After that, mixing of
oxygen and/or ozone is stopped. Only inert gas is
25 supplied for purge, and normal exposure operation is
executed.

The effects unique to this arrangement will be

explained. Short-wavelength exposure light such as far
ultraviolet rays, particularly, an ArF excimer laser
beam or fluorine excimer laser beam decomposes an
impurity such as organic molecules in the air. The
5 decomposition product is deposited on an optical
element. The surface of the optical element bears a
carbon film, a carbon-containing film, or a deposit of
the organic compound. The transmittance of the optical
element gradually decreases to decrease the illuminance
10 at the image plane, resulting in low throughput. In
the above embodiments, the vicinity of the reticle 6 or
wafer 21 is purged with inert gas to minimize the
impurity concentration, but a small amount of impurity
may remain. For example, degassing may occur from a
15 resist applied to the wafer 21 or an adhesive layer
between the resist and the wafer 21 during or before
exposure, and an impurity may exist near a sheet glass
35 below the projection optical system 19. Also, the
reticle 6 with a small amount of impurity may be loaded
20 and part of the impurity may evaporate, or degassing
may occur from an adhesive layer between the reticle 6
and a pellicle frame or an adhesive layer between the
pellicle frame and a pellicle 5, and the impurity may
exist near a sheet glass 4 below the illumination
25 optical system 1, the sheet glass 30 of the reticle
surface plate 10, or the surface of an optical element
above the projection optical system 19. In these cases,

the organic compound decomposed and produced by exposure is deposited on optical elements, and the transmittance gradually decreases. To prevent this, these optical elements are illuminated with exposure
5 light during purge while a small amount of ozone is mixed in inert gas. The deposited organic compound is oxidized and decomposed by a so-called ozone cleaning effect, and deposition of the decomposition product is prevented. Alternatively, the optical elements are
10 illuminated with exposure light during purge while a small amount of oxygen is mixed in inert gas. Then, oxygen is converted into ozone by photochemical reaction, obtaining the same ozone cleaning effect as that of mixture of ozone. Periodic execution of this
15 processing can prevent a decrease in illuminance at the image plane and can always maintain high throughput.

<Embodiment of Semiconductor Production System>

A production system for a semiconductor device (semiconductor chip such as an IC or LSI, liquid
20 crystal panel, CCD, thin-film magnetic head, micromachine, or the like) will be exemplified. A trouble remedy or periodic maintenance of a manufacturing apparatus installed in a semiconductor manufacturing factory, or maintenance service such as
25 software distribution is performed by using a computer network outside the manufacturing factory.

Fig. 7 shows the overall system cut out at a

given angle. In Fig. 7, reference numeral 101 denotes a business office of a vendor (apparatus supply manufacturer) which provides a semiconductor device manufacturing apparatus. Assumed examples of the manufacturing apparatus are semiconductor manufacturing apparatuses for various processes used in a semiconductor manufacturing factory, such as pre-process apparatuses (lithography apparatus including an exposure apparatus, resist processing apparatus, and etching apparatus, annealing apparatus, film formation apparatus, planarization apparatus, and the like) and post-process apparatuses (assembly apparatus, inspection apparatus, and the like). The business office 101 comprises a host management system 108 for providing a maintenance database for the manufacturing apparatus, a plurality of operation terminal computers 110, and a LAN (Local Area Network) 109 which connects the host management system 108 and computers 110 to construct an intranet. The host management system 108 has a gateway for connecting the LAN 109 to Internet 105 as an external network of the business office, and a security function for limiting external accesses.

Reference numerals 102 to 104 denote manufacturing factories of the semiconductor manufacturer as users of manufacturing apparatuses. The manufacturing factories 102 to 104 may belong to

different manufacturers or the same manufacturer
(pre-process factory, post-process factory, and the
like). Each of the factories 102 to 104 is equipped
with a plurality of manufacturing apparatuses 106, a
5 LAN (Local Area Network) 111 which connects these
apparatuses 106 to construct an intranet, and a host
management system 107 serving as a monitoring apparatus
for monitoring the operation status of each
manufacturing apparatus 106. The host management
10 system 107 in each of the factories 102 to 104 has a
gateway for connecting the LAN 111 in the factory to
the Internet 105 as an external network of the factory.
Each factory can access the host management system 108
of the vendor 101 from the LAN 111 via the Internet-105.
15 The security function of the host management system 108
authorizes access of only a limited user. More
specifically, the factory notifies the vender via the
Internet 105 of status information (e.g., the symptom
of a manufacturing apparatus in trouble) representing
20 the operation status of each manufacturing apparatus
106. The factory can receive, from the vender,
response information (e.g., information designating a
remedy against the trouble, or remedy software or data)
corresponding to the notification, or maintenance
25 information such as the latest software or help
information. Data communication between the factories
102 to 104 and the vender 101 and data communication

via the LAN 111 in each factory adopt a communication protocol (TCP/IP) generally used in the Internet.

Instead of using the Internet as an external network of the factory, a dedicated-line network (e.g., ISDN)

5 having high security which inhibits access of a third party can be adopted. It is also possible that the user constructs a database in addition to one provided by the vendor and sets the database on an external network and that the host management system authorizes
10 access to the database from a plurality of user factories.

Fig. 8 is a view showing the concept of the overall system of this embodiment that is cut out at a different angle from Fig. 7. In the above example, a
15 plurality of user factories having manufacturing apparatuses and the management system of the manufacturing apparatus vendor are connected via an external network, and production management of each factory or information of at least one manufacturing
20 apparatus is communicated via the external network. In the example of Fig. 8, a factory having manufacturing apparatuses of a plurality of vendors, and the management systems of the vendors for these manufacturing apparatuses are connected via the
25 external network of the factory, and maintenance information of each manufacturing apparatus is communicated. In Fig. 8, reference numeral 201 denotes

a manufacturing factory of a manufacturing apparatus user (semiconductor device manufacturer) where manufacturing apparatuses for various processes, e.g., an exposure apparatus 202, resist processing apparatus 203, and film formation apparatus 204 are installed in the manufacturing line of the factory. Fig. 8 shows only one manufacturing factory 201, but a plurality of factories are networked in practice. The respective apparatuses in the factory are connected to a LAN 206 to construct an intranet, and a host management system 205 manages the operation of the manufacturing line. The business offices of vendors (apparatus supply manufacturers) such as an exposure apparatus manufacturer 210, resist processing apparatus manufacturer 220, and film formation apparatus manufacturer 230 comprise host management systems 211, 221, and 231 for executing remote maintenance for the supplied apparatuses. Each host management system has a maintenance database and a gateway for an external network, as described above. The host management system 205 for managing the apparatuses in the manufacturing factory of the user, and the management systems 211, 221, and 231 of the vendors for the respective apparatuses are connected via the Internet or dedicated-line network serving as an external network 200. If a trouble occurs in any one of a series of manufacturing apparatuses along the

manufacturing line in this system, the operation of the manufacturing line stops. This trouble can be quickly solved by remote maintenance from the vendor of the apparatus in trouble via the Internet 200. This can
5 minimize the stop of the manufacturing line.

Each of manufacturing apparatuses in the semiconductor manufacturing factory comprises a display, a network interface, and a computer for executing network access software and apparatus operating
10 software which are stored in a storage device. The storage device is a built-in memory, hard disk, or network file server. The network access software includes a dedicated or general-purpose web browser, and provides a user interface having a window as shown
15 in Fig. 9 on the display. While referring to this window, the operator who manages manufacturing apparatuses in each factory inputs, in input items on the windows, pieces of information such as the type of manufacturing apparatus (401), serial number (402),
20 subject of trouble (403), occurrence date (404), degree of urgency (405), symptom (406), remedy (407), and progress (408). The pieces of input information are transmitted to the maintenance database via the Internet, and appropriate maintenance information is
25 sent back from the maintenance database and displayed on the display. The user interface provided by the web browser realizes hyperlink functions (410 to 412), as

shown in Fig. 9. This allows the operator in the factory to access detailed information of each item, receive the latest-version software to be used for a manufacturing apparatus from a software library
5 provided by a vendor, and receive an operation guide (help information) as a reference for the operator in the factory. The maintenance information provided by the maintenance database also includes information about the features of the present invention described
10 above. The software library also provides the latest-version software for implementing the features of the present invention.

A semiconductor device manufacturing process using the above-described production system will be
15 explained. Fig. 10 shows the flow of the whole manufacturing process of the semiconductor device. In step 1 (circuit design), a semiconductor device circuit is designed. In step 2 (mask formation), a mask having a designed circuit pattern is formed. In step 3 (wafer
20 manufacture), a wafer is manufactured using a material such as silicon. In step 4 (wafer process) called a pre-process, an actual circuit is formed on the wafer by lithography using the prepared mask and wafer. Step
5 (assembly) called a post-process is the step of
25 forming a semiconductor chip by using the wafer manufactured in step 4, and includes an assembly process (dicing and bonding) and packaging process

(chip encapsulation). In step 6 (inspection), inspections such as the operation confirmation test and durability test of the semiconductor device manufactured in step 5 are conducted. After these steps, the semiconductor device is completed and shipped (step 7). The pre-process and post-process are performed in separate dedicated factories, and maintenance is done for each of the factories by the above-described remote maintenance system. Information for production management and apparatus maintenance is communicated between the pre-process factory and the post-process factory via the Internet or dedicated-line network.

Fig. 11 shows the detailed flow of the wafer process. In step 11 (oxidation), the wafer surface is oxidized. In step 12 (CVD), an insulating film is formed on the wafer surface. In step 13 (electrode formation), an electrode is formed on the wafer by vapor deposition. In step 14 (ion implantation), ions are implanted in the wafer. In step 15 (resist processing), a photosensitive agent is applied to the wafer. In step 16 (exposure), the above-mentioned exposure apparatus exposes the wafer to the circuit pattern of a mask. In step 17 (developing), the exposed wafer is developed. In step 18 (etching), the resist is etched except for the developed resist image. In step 19 (resist removal), an unnecessary resist

after etching is removed. These steps are repeated to form multiple circuit patterns on the wafer. A manufacturing apparatus used in each step undergoes maintenance by the remote maintenance system, which prevents a trouble in advance. Even if a trouble occurs, the manufacturing apparatus can be quickly recovered. The productivity of the semiconductor device can be increased in comparison with the prior art.

10 As has been described above, according to the present invention, oxygen and moisture can be partially, effectively purged near a reticle and/or wafer in an exposure apparatus using ultraviolet rays, particularly, an ArF excimer laser beam or fluorine (F₂) excimer laser beam. A sufficient transmittance and stability of the ArF excimer laser beam or fluorine (F₂) excimer laser beam can be obtained. This realizes high-precision projection exposure and satisfactory projection of a fine circuit pattern.

20 As many apparently widely different embodiments of the present invention can be made without departing from the spirit and scope thereof, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited to the specific embodiments thereof except as defined in the
25 appended claims.